

Faust's friends help QB make grade

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he was in trouble."

Akron U assistant coach Gerald Carr explained to Fazio just how deep Johnson's trouble ran.

"It was 2-minute warning time," Fazio said. "This kid was at the crossroads."

Fazio stepped in. He shepherded Johnson through registration, making sure he got the classes he needed. He introduced him to the English department's writing center. He found him tutors.

"Michael's attitude the first three weeks was more that of someone going through the motions, not someone whose life was on the line," Fazio said.

"The turning point was when Coach Carr came to see him."

Gerald Carr not only coaches Akron U's quarterbacks, he played the position at Southern Illinois not that many years ago.

"Carr," Faust said, "is a wonderful role model. He laid down the law."

And Johnson listened.

"I saw him right after Carr's visit and he was a changed person," Fazio said. "He had fire in his eyes."

Everything began to fall into place. For every hour Johnson invested — he literally went to class, studied or worked with tu-

tors from 7 a.m. until midnight — something good happened.

Sometimes, strange things.

On the week Johnson had to begin at Phoenix College a class he could not get at Mesa, the freeway between the two campuses opened.

"They'd been working on it for five years," Fazio said.

The week after the summer session ended, the freeway closed for a week. Without it, Johnson could not have gotten back and forth between classes on time.

"Michael had a lot of people looking out for him," Fazio said.

And in case they weren't enough, Fazio went a step farther.

"I said a lot of prayers to St. Jude."

It seemed a good choice. Jude is the saint of lost causes or impossible tasks.

Zips declare Penland ineligible

Junior Cornel Penland, a returning starter for the University of Akron football team at wide receiver, was declared academically ineligible Tuesday for the fall semester.

Penland (5-foot-9, 170 pounds) caught 10 passes for 199 yards, including an 84-yard touchdown reception, last season.

Darren Johnson (5-7, 175), a

As the second summer session drew to a conclusion, Fazio had taken his prayers to Hawaii on a long-planned family vacation.

"I told my wife," Fazio said, "that it was like walking out of a game in the fourth quarter."

So Fazio telephoned Johnson on the mainland.

It wasn't their last conversation. That occurred after Johnson had finished his final class and was preparing to go to the airport to fly to Akron and his future.

"As we sat there," Fazio said, "he told me how much he appreciated everything that had happened to him at Mesa."

Fazio looked into Johnson's eyes.

"Someday, Mike," he said, "you'll be in a position where somebody will need your help."

"I'll be ready," Johnson promised.

"You know," Fazio said Tuesday, "I think he will be."

And that, will be the rest of the rest of the Mike Johnson Story.

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